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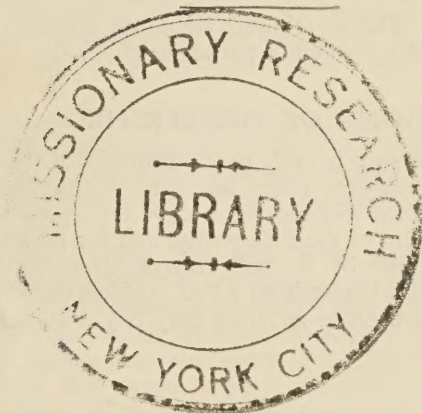
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COMMUNISM AND THE CHURCH

by

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COMMUNISM AND THE CHURCH

Not very long ago, I read in a Bombay Parish Magazine of a conversation between a Priest and a Communist. The topic of this revealed to me the great urgency of the situation when Church and Communism are faced with each other. In this conversation the Communist stated frankly that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a much more powerful weapon for the renewal of society than Marxist philosophy, but he was quite sure that Communism will win the day. His reasons for the ultimate victory of Communism were that Communists are more realistic and more determined to achieve their aims than Christians. Communists study their faith, they give of their earnings money for propaganda purposes, and they also devote all their free time and even holidays for the propagation of their faith. Christians, he says, even if they believe in the supreme value of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, do not as individuals spread the good news, neither are they willing to sacrifice time or money for this purpose.

As Christians we must take note of this, there is much we can learn from the methods employed by Communism, and we have to admit to having failed as individuals to make the Gospel of Our Lord known. Too often we sit back and enjoy the comfort our faith provides for us, leaving the spreading of it to specialist agencies, the Missionary Societies of the Church. But each of us, in school or at work, must like the Communist bear witness through our work and our impact on other people, and show that we are members of Christ's Church and only too willing to tell our friends and colleagues of the good news, asking them to share it with us.

If evangelism does not become the personal obligation of each of us the danger could arise that Communism or any other "ism" may win the day. This personal witness of every Christian in this country and abroad demands a study of our faith, and a knowledge of Marxism.

The emergence of Islam as a religion and a military power in the Seventh Century is the best comparison we can make with the rapid expansion of Communism in our own time. Communism claims the allegiance of millions of men and women of many races and colours in Asia, Europe and other parts of the Globe. The Marxist gospel, limited to this world, with a message directed towards classes and societies, faces Christianity whose Gospel, embracing also this world but reaching out beyond it, has a message to individuals who are made in the image of God with an eternal inheritance.

Communism has to be classed as a world religion, competing with Christianity as an agency for the possession of man's mind.

THE RISE OF THE NEW FAITH.

Let us be clear from the outset, Communism is a revolutionary faith which has made converts for about a hundred years in all parts of the globe. It became vocal with the publication of a small pamphlet, the Communist manifesto, in 1848, written in London by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. This small compact gospel of Communism, translated into many languages, fell like a bombshell in the society of its day. Signs and indications of revolutionary socialism had been heralded by the French Revolution. England at the time of the pamphlet's publication was at the beginning of the industrial revolution, and the message of a future Utopia, easily reached by the simple overthrow of the existing social order and social conditions, had a fascination for the thousands of the dispossessed and landless population who came to the cities to work the newly-invented machines.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was the son of a German lawyer and a Christian convert from Judaism. The study of the philosophy of Hegel influenced the thinking of Marx. He became most radical in his political opinions and had to leave his native land, and via Paris came to this country, where he met Engels (1820-1895), and their life-long collaboration began. Engels was a Prussian who worked for his firm in Manchester. Both Marx and Engels endeavoured to reconcile the then existing socialist theories by constructing a philosophy of scientific socialism, inverting Hegel's dialectic and applying it to economic and political history with the new name of Dialectical Materialism.

The course of Victorian industry made this view plausible, and Marx's and Engels' conception of History as a materialistic development has changed much in the writing of history since that day. The Manifesto, along with the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the American Declaration of Independence, has been one of the most influential documents in human history. The Manifesto states that all history is the struggle of classes, naming the bourgeoisie as rulers of the world responsible for their own destruction in the end by inventing machinery and becoming capitalists, and thereby creating a proletariat, a new class of people. These new people, mere hands of the capitalists, are forced into ceaseless struggle against their oppressors.

Fortunately for the West, in spite of the many abuses its industry and greed created, the economic system managed to better the social conditions of its working class, and it was only with the establishment of Soviet Russia that Marxism had its first chance to apply its creed.

THE FAITH AT WORK.

Soviet Russia has worked the miracle, from being thirty-four years ago one of the most backward countries in the world to

becoming the second most powerful state in the world to-day. This achievement alone makes the Communist creed most attractive to the rest of Asia and all other under-developed countries still hoping to get rid of their poverty. Considering such vast results, the articles of the new faith are simple. Marx's analysis is purely economic, and labour is the source of all values. The strength of this doctrine is derived from its protest against all that is evil in the social structure. This attracted as followers the students and the intellectuals who were looking for a purpose in life, and on the other hand, the masses of the dispossessed who saw their grievances chalked on the banners of the Party.

RELATIONS WITH CHRISTIANITY.

The greatest need of man, whatever his condition in life, is to have a purpose in life: without this, hope is lost for the masses, and the intellectual turns cynic. Dr. A. G. Toynbee in his *Study of History* states: "The elements that have made Communism an explosive force are not of Hegel's creation; they bear on their face their certificate of origin from the ancestral religious faith of the West, Christianity which, three hundred years after the philosophic challenge from Descartes, was still being drunk in by every western child with his mother's milk and imbibed by every western man and woman in the air they breathed. And such elements in Marxism as cannot be traced to Christianity can be found in Judaism, the parent of Christianity. Marx has taken a goddess 'Historical necessity' in place of Jaweh for his deity, and the international proletariat of the western world in place of Jewry for his Chosen People, and his Messianic kingdom is conceived as a dictatorship of the proletariat."

Marxism envisages a kingdom of this world: salvation means to reach the right stage of historical development. No morality, apart from fulfilling the historical process, is admitted; right and wrong appear only if they hinder or help this achievement; great optimism prevails about man's ability to perfect himself; trust is put alone in human power. This of course is also characteristic of the scientific age in which we live.

THE CHRISTIAN ANSWER.

The obvious answer to Communism lies in the establishment on this earth of the Church of Jesus Christ. Being on earth, the Church has often failed, and to-day we are sometimes embarrassed by the unfortunate inheritance our forefathers have left us. Only too often in the past the Church was only too anxious to preserve the existing order, and many Churchmen acquiesced in the status quo. "The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate," illustrates how far the Church went in its apathy towards social justice. But cautious we must be, though grateful to Marxism for

compelling us to reconsider the function of the Church within society. We must be clear that all our reasons for taking action depend upon theological conviction and not upon political necessity.

Christ's Church on earth is old in terms of human reckoning, but the essentials are the same to-day as two thousand years ago. In the same way as Marxists demand the study of Marx, we as Christians must study our Faith and the Bible so that eventually a now professedly Christian society becomes a real Christian community. Only the study of our own faith will reveal to us why the human soul is sacred and how it is that man cannot perfect himself. It is Christianity that sheds its great illumination upon human life by taking the central mystery of man's existence, creative, suffering, redeeming love, and makes it, embodied in Christ crucified and risen, the explanation of all other mysteries.

The true nature of the Church of Jesus Christ is to be found in the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. Here man, in Baptism, is admitted to a new order; and in Communion he is committed to direct his life into a channel demanding high integrity, discipline, and a readiness to live constantly in the presence of God. In the life of Jesus Christ God has revealed in human terms the nature and purpose of human life. Man is a responsible being, accountable to God for the use he makes of his life. The Christian's life is a sphere of service in obedience to God's will and in service to his fellow men. I know this is an ideal conception; few of us live up to it and millions of so-called Christians are living in a spiritual vacuum in our world to-day. But the Faith and the Church are established, and man has free will to partake of them. Communists study their creed: why not Christians?

Christianity is not a party within the state, nor the originator of a social programme. But in spite of the belief that the Kingdom of God is not of this world, and that salvation does not lie within a given social system, Christians must concern themselves with material welfare and social justice. The Church itself cannot identify itself with a prevailing political system because systems cannot redeem humanity, but humanity can redeem systems through the grace of God in each individual.

The followers of the Church of Christ must give to the Church as much in the way of sacrifice, service and study as the Marxists give to their party. The Christian can witness in his daily work, be he a Minister of the Crown or a street cleaner, making in this way an impact on the nation as a whole, and in the behaviour of his nation a Christian impact on the world. Let us beware of putting the Church of Christ up as an alternative to Communism or democracy or any other "ism." The Church is a way of life leading man to the kingdom to come. To Christians, Communists

are a people in need of fellowship and prayer, who under the guise of atheism worship a false god, materialism and man. To-day Communism is within the mission field of the Church, and Christians have the duty to train themselves by hard study in the essentials of their faith in order to become missionaries to Communists.

As Christians we must make known our Church and her concern that God's will be done on earth as well as in heaven. Only then a new Jerusalem can be built upon this earth by our own efforts through the grace of God in each of us.

We read in St. John 16, 33: "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Christians can take great comfort in the final outcome. Men are tempted to bstride the world by the temptation of a short cut to Utopia, but together with Our Lord we must reject the kingdoms of this world if this means to fall down and worship the Devil.

I hope this short article will help some in their attitude towards understanding the meaning of Communism and the Church's position and place in this world. It is up to every one of us to concern ourselves that God's will be done on this earth as it is in Heaven. We can see to it that the Church is standing for the spiritual principles of justice and brotherhood. If we ourselves as Christians are prepared to suffer for them, then other men will not be willing to throw in their weight with the forces of Communism if they see us as members of Christ's Church on earth working for the new Jerusalem. Let us earnestly go forth and pray, study, work, and give personal witness, so that our parishes become centres which care for the whole of man.

I have used much in my article from *Kingdom of this World*, by M. V. C. Jeffreys, published by A. B. Mowbray, 6/-; and *Communism*, by J. Drewett, published by Edinburgh House Press, 1/-; both of which I highly recommend for reading. These books can be bought from the S.P.G. Publications Department, or borrowed from the S.P.G. Library.

